

Dewey Decimal Detectives

by Chris Haeffner

How many times a day does a student come up to your circulation desk asking how to find a book on the shelves? From the very young to the appallingly old, the Dewey Decimal System remains a mystery. Teaching students how to locate books according to call number can be a despairingly difficult task, but the following lesson gives younger students a fun introduction that will help them make sense of library shelves.

Library Media Skills Objectives:

The student will recognize that nonfiction materials are arranged in numerical order according to the subject classification of the Dewey Decimal System.

The student will understand that spine labels contain the call number which identifies where an item is placed on the shelf.

The student will be able to locate items on the shelf according to their Dewey Decimal number.

Curriculum (subject area) Objectives:

This activity may be used independently or with a mathematics unit to reinforce numerical order.

Grade Levels: 1-2

Resources:

Tag-board magnifying glasses, laminated
Call number clue cards
Automated card catalog
Story

Instructional Roles:

After a story telling and introduction, the classroom teacher and library media specialist work together to help students locate books according to the Dewey Decimal number.

Activity and Procedures for Completion:

Begin this lesson by asking students to look around the library media center. Ask the following: What do you notice about all of the books? (They're all on shelves, they all stand up, they all have stickers on their spines, etc.) Do you notice how every book seems to have its own special spot?

Point out to the students: For instance, every time I try to find my favorite book about karate, it's always in the same place! It's the same way with puppies and ponies and pioneers. I can always find them in the same spot! Have you ever wondered why that is? There's actually a very interesting story...

At this point launch into an animated storytelling of "The Tale of the Mixed-up Library"

(see page 23). Though completely fiction, this story will give students an idea of how nonfiction is organized in a library, leaving them with the message that every book has its own call number and its own special spot on the shelves. The story can be changed and adapted to each audience, but an original version with which to begin is included. Use a magnifying glass and a lot of enthusiastic "Ahas!" when telling the story!

Once finished with the story, tell students that they will be uncovering clues to find certain books in their own library media center. Tell them it won't be easy and that it takes a lot of practice, but good library detectives look high and low to discover where specific books "live." Their only clue will be a call number. Examine a larger-than-life sized spine label and discuss how the different parts guide us towards finding the book on the shelf.

Using the tag-board magnifying glass as a prop, model the process of finding a call number, writing it down, and using what we know about numerical order to narrow down the location, and, finally, find the book. While looking for the book, you might say, "I'm looking for a book about snakes. Aha! The call number for snakes is 597. Let's see (looking through the magnifying glass)... here's 398, not there yet. Here's 550! I'm getting closer! Oops—600,

I've gone too far!" This is an excellent time to share with students the direction and flow of reading shelves—left to right, top to bottom.

Finally, give each pair of students their own "clue" (call number and subject heading) and magnifying glass. Don't worry about specific author or title at this time; just allow students to practice using the shelves to find the assigned numbers. Once they've found a book about their subject, have them stand by their discovery until a teacher can check on them and give them a new clue to search. Continue until each pair has had several opportunities to be successful.

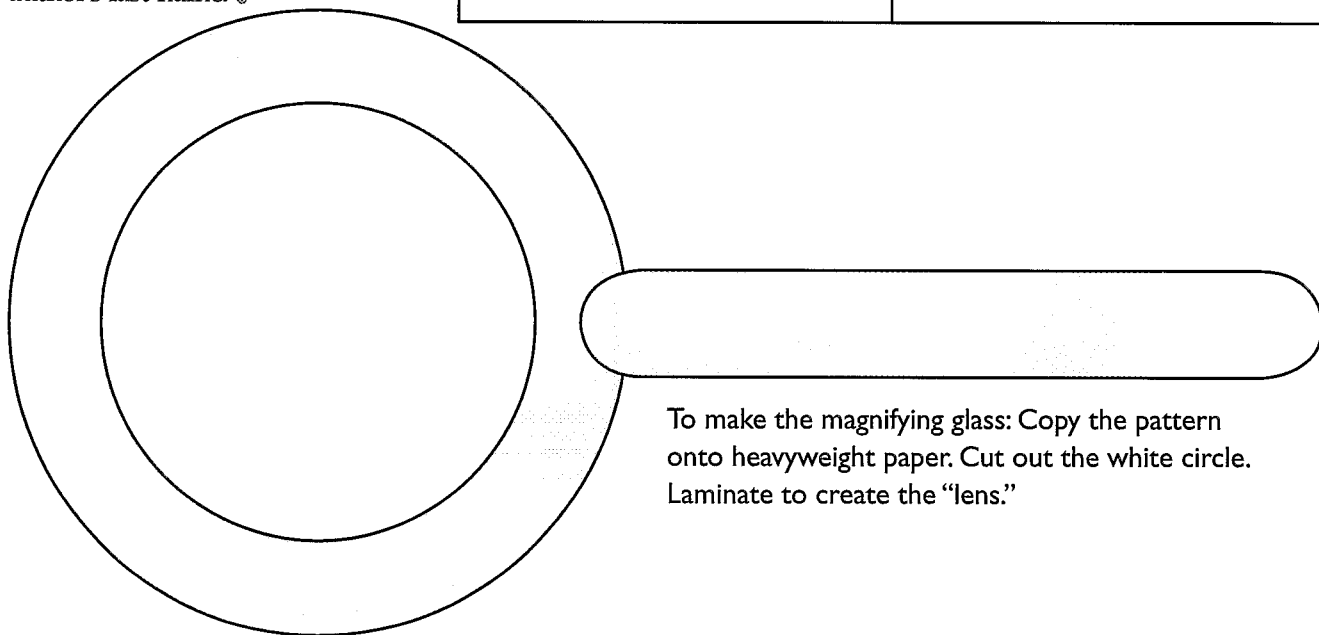
Evaluation:

Students will be able to locate books on the shelf according to the Dewey Decimal number.

Follow-Up:

Once students have mastered finding books in a certain subject area, have them practice finding specific titles by searching for both the Dewey Decimal number and author's last name. 🖐

Sharks 597	Japan 952
Farms 630	Space 520
Jokes 818	Sports 796
Mummies 393	Alphabet 411
Drawing 743	Buildings 720
Ghosts 133	Poetry 811



To make the magnifying glass: Copy the pattern onto heavyweight paper. Cut out the white circle. Laminate to create the "lens."



COPYRIGHT INFORMATION

TITLE: Dewey Decimal Detectives
SOURCE: School Library Media Activities Monthly 22 no4 D 2005
PAGE(S): 21-2

The magazine publisher is the copyright holder of this article and it is reproduced with permission. Further reproduction of this article in violation of the copyright is prohibited.